

DOCUMENTARY VIDEOMAKING GUIDE

UNDERSTANDING DOCUMENTARY AS A CONSTRUCT

1. Take responsibility for your version of reality--media is always “interpreting.”

- A. Alter setting slightly to suggest things or compose
 - Put in plants, rugs, posters, books, toys
 - Put in children playing, tools of craft
 - Lamps on or off
- B. Can show grimness, innocence, profundity
- C. Choose suggestive or evocative camera angles
- D. Compose foreground, background
- E. Editing: use sound effects, louder sound in editing, music, tones
- F. Shooting: shadows, no fill, harsh light, romantic backlight,
 - people lounging around lazily or purposeful

2. Both in scripting and in shooting, know the ways of maintaining visual interest, effectively taping interviews.

- A. With talent
 - Keep down tension
 - Natural setting
 - No dark glasses
 - Two people or group talking animatedly
 - Group sitting close together
 - Seemingly 'eavesdropping'
 - Talent walking or standing, but no gravel crunch
- B. Shoot many cutaways, of what they are talking about, for ex.,
 - or people passing by, going in and out
- C. Shooting tactics
 - Decide in advance how much information to cover--get summary on tape right away from your talent
 - Establish one central visual theme
 - Observe eyeline match
 - Walking out of room is good transition
 - Use extreme close-ups
 - Shift locations, move camera, change angle
 - At end, tape nod shots-- both of interviewer and talent as if they were listening intently to the other; do this in close-up and over the shoulder, not with mouth moving.
 - Cutaways, cutaways, cutaways--film them at length
 - and in great variety, and in close up

3. At moment of taping the interviews

- Do voice test for levels
- Do not overrehearse, only rehearse questions and blocking

Ask yourself, why talk to this person?
Nod, do not interrupt interesting replies, listen intently
Avoid verbal--"uh uh"
Keep eye contact
Take breaks, build confidence, be in charge, set tone for event
Interviewer has fact sheet on card
Ask simple short questions, unless it's your story, too
Set final style--will we, in final tape, see interviewer, hear
questions, see crew and mike?
Silent cues among crew agreed on in advance, be unobtrusive
Avoid yes/no questions

4. Documentary ethics

Let person speak at length
Do not alter person's main stance by manipulative editing
Respect and consult with talent about self-presentation
It implies a good-faith contract, including forms of veto power
Strategies for and problems with anonymity
It's interesting but tricky to depict person under stress
Audiences have special interest in a person doing work or craft
Utilize people's need to tell a stranger
Gain best results from genuine intimacy, knowing someone well
Know problems of taping your own family--staying outside the
family process via art
Problems with taping lover, nude child, illegal matters

5. Styles

Narration in voice over
Scripted, control
Reductive, typage, selected images as illustration
Boring, lacks authentic feel, authoritative (often male)
When good, like an essay, know and trust "author"
Bronowski, ASCENT OF MAN
Mazruri, THE AFRICANS
Joseph Campbell and Coppola on myth
Cinema verite
We can tell quality of relation with crew--love for subject who is filmed
Sense of intimacy
Time to get to know someone
Interaction with camera people implied
Showing social relations via environments --
If you know the people well, you know the story behind the locale--the chair's history, what happens at that corner or outside that pizza parlor, the people's personalities, differences between the children in a family
Poverty opens up into a textured environment

Need to show uniqueness of individual
 Accents and forms of expression
 Body types
 "Small" person's story or behind the scenes of important person
 Texture of daily life, of moment
 Talking heads plus cutaways
 People are authorities on own situation
 Common social and political wisdom
 Filmmaker often omits racism or sexism of people who are film's heroes
 Emphasize unpleasant aspects of someone--ethics?? Political
 reasons for that??

TASKS FOR THE VIDEOMAKER

1. Scripting stage

A. Conceptual tasks

How to create visual variety
 How to create continuity
 Craft, imagination, creativity
 Planning

B. Shaping original focus

Feasibility, length
 Goal, assignment, interest
 How do I approach topic?
 Where can I get pictures, images?
 Unifying focus?
 Original music--necessary for independent productions? Sound
 FX, Douglass listening room

C. Leave in contingency time

for retakes, setting up lights, rain, illness, prepping and putting talent
 at ease, getting missing equipment

D. Preproduction planning sheets.

Decide questions you will ask.
 Preinterview, plan visuals--where does visual potential lie?
 Decision making structure, will everyone shoot?
 Give and take, get advice. What goes around comes around.

2. Budget

See form in books in library, include meals
 Use only good tape, about \$8-9 for videotape, always unused; about
 \$3-4 for audio cassette, always unused.

3. Remote production equipment checklist

Be specific and list every item in suitcases, every plug, tape, cable, filters, gels, etc.

4. Production time table and written schedule

Routing of cables
 Items, furniture, props, plants, posters -- to bring or to arrange at location
 Handling intrusions, potential noise, people on site, as well as hazards

Getting releases
Storage, transportation, return time
Charge and recharge batteries

5. Story outline or treatment

Organization of material thought out in advance.
What do we want to see and hear at each point in the program?
There is a useful predictability of documentary format--can estimate kinds of cutaways, visual variety, change of angle
Show a process, family, snapshots, etc
Pace
Music, ambient sound -- slides, cassettes

6. Daily production script

Cut and paste for location or talent
Shoot all related material at once

7. Interview questions

Focus on the person's story or passion
Have more questions than you will need
Get release forms

8. Remote location survey

Visit under conditions similar to shoot
Do a sketch
Anticipate camera viewpoints
What kinds of lights, gels, filters?
Audio characteristics of that space
Electrical outlets, what to turn off (frig), where cables needed--do diagram

9. Shooting procedure

Shoot wide shots, outdoor shots first
Punctuality, your professional reputation and demeanor
Shoot in short sections
Label tapes
Do field shot log

10. Keep a diary during the shoot, a journal of what happened

11. Do a complete log of shots, for editing

Based on field shot log, tell content of each shot
On TV look at footage, tell kind of shot--cu, ms, ls, and what kind of Camera movement or movement in frame. What's on sound track?
Tell what's bad, good, passable.

Never use out of focus shots, or awkward camera movt

12. Compose a final version on paper first, with an edit shot list

Planned audio edits--from where, length, words
Planned video edits--from where, time
Digital production
On line production -- need to learn to use time code